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President's Corner

Rick Anderson, NASIG President

Looking Back: UKSG and the Fury of Iceland

I write this column having just returned—much more recently than planned—from a wonderful UKSG meeting followed by a harrowing experience of travel chaos, one that I shared with our past president, Jill Emery, and our Merriman Award winner, Selden Lamoureux.

First the happy memories: the UKSG meeting was fantastic. Though it was sadly impossible to attend every session, the ones I attended were almost uniformly excellent. My notes contain particular praise for plenary sessions featuring Richard Wallis of Talis (“We all overestimate the impact of new technology in three years and underestimate its impact in ten”), Conrad Wolfram of Wolfram Research (“High-powered computation changes everything, even the way we think about what knowledge is and how it’s shared”) and of course Carol Tenopir of the University of Tennessee, who shared her brilliant recent work on tracking and analyzing the research library’s return on institutional investment. There were very stimulating sessions on issues and controversies in bibliometrics, and on social networking as an essential tool of academic research. I attended excellent breakout sessions too, from the likes of Paul Harwood (who discussed emerging trends in library-delivered e-textbooks), Jill Taylor-Roe (who followed up on some of her incisive research findings related to the sustainability of Big Deals) and Ian Russell (on the future of society journal publishing), not to mention Jill

Emery’s very fine presentation on a selection/deselection tool developed in cooperation at the universities of Texas and Georgia and those institutions’ move towards patron-driven selection.

The venue was as good as the program. The Edinburgh International Conference Center is situated in the heart of the city center, and is the most fully and graciously staffed meeting space I’ve ever experienced; the entrance was staffed by uniformed attendants, and at the head and foot of every escalator there were stately ladies in matching suits who charmingly kept all of us heading the right directions. The meeting rooms were comfortable, the food was delicious, and the UKSG’s organizers did their usual logistical magic to make everything feel smooth and well-organized.

Then the meeting ended, and all hell broke loose.

On Wednesday night following the close of the conference, an Icelandic volcano whose name is actually physically impossible to say erupted and began blanketing northern Europe in a cloud of airplane-killing ash. Jill, Selden and I found ourselves trapped. Since England was initially unaffected and my flight had a connection in London, I got rebooked for a later flight out of Heathrow and took the train south; Jill and Selden, who were both booked to fly directly out of Edinburgh, remained there to wait it out. After a couple of days it became clear that this situation might drag on for a week or more. Some of our colleagues made plans to escape via train through southern Europe, beyond

the cloud's reach. Since flights were moving without problem between Ireland and North America, I rebooked again and hopped over to Dublin, but by the time I got there Irish airspace had closed as well. Things finally settled down after a very tense six days. Jill and Selden took the ferry to Belfast and flew home from there, and a day later I was able to fly out of Dublin. All in all, we spent an extra eight days in the British Isles—which may not sound terrible (and indeed there were many, many people worse off than us, including some Brits still stranded abroad as I write), but it was certainly one of the more stressful travel experiences any of us will ever have. Hopefully, in fact, it was the *most* stressful travel experience any of us will ever have. All of us are now safely home, though, and can laugh about it. Ha.

Looking Forward: Palm Springs and our 25th Anniversary

I've already promised a complete lack of snow for our 25th anniversary conference in Palm Springs next month. I'm now prepared to make another promise: there will be no volcano eruptions anywhere near our

event. And I can now also promise an excellent program, as well as beautiful (and startlingly affordable) accommodations, great meeting spaces, top-notch golf, very good restaurants, and shopping that rivals what you'll find in Los Angeles. Vendors and publishers are signing up in gratifying numbers to participate in our newly-instituted Vendor Exposition, and there are great special events lined up as well. But what will really make this conference worth the investment will be the opportunity to meet with, learn from, and forge new connections with professionals from every link in the serials information chain. Come help us celebrate our past and prepare for our future!

I look forward greatly to seeing you there.